STATEMENT BY MINISTER

SITUATION ARISING OUT OF THE ON-GOING STRIKE OF THE TRUCK TRANSPORTERS IN THE COUNTRY

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (MAJ. GEN.(RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI) : Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, a seven point Charter of Demands was received from the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) on 25th March, 2003. Thereafter, a ten point Charter of Demands was received on 4th April, 2003. Since some of the demands were to be acted upon by other State Governments/other Central Ministries, these were conveyed to the respective authorities immediately. On 7th April, 2003, AIMTC were invited for discussions on their demands. However, they replied *vide* their fax dated 8th April, 2003, that they would talk only to the Minister and that their President was on tour and he would be available only on 13th April, 2003.

However, two meetings, on 7th April and 11th April, were held between the representatives of AIMTC and officers of this Ministry. At these meetings, it was explained to them that there was no conflict between AIMTC and Government's stand on most of the issues. They were, therefore, requested to call off/defer their proposed agitation.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU (WEST BENGAL) : Sir, it seems there are no clarifications. This Statement can be laid on the Table of the House.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA) : No, that is against the Rule. That is why I am allowing this.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU : But, Sir, there have been precedents.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA) : I am not going to accept your wrong precedent. If there is a precedent, that is wrong. Let him continue. I have looked into it. I have also consulted. This is wrong. Let him continue.

MAJ. GEN.(RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI : Yet, AIMTC chose to start the strike at 0600 hours on 14th April, 2003.

The representatives of AIMTC met me on 17th April, 2003. At this meeting, they conveyed their demands. I explained the Government's stand on each of the demands. I also requested them to call off the agitation.

Out of the ten demands of AIMTC, there is no difference of opinion on seven of them. These seven are:-

Repeal order pertaining to 15-year old vehicles.

Insurance companies be disciplined.

Non-inclusion of transporters under VAT.

Fix minimum freight rates for trucks.

National permit scheme be made more logical.

Computerization of Driving Licenses and Registration Books, and

Amendment of Carriers Act, 1865.

The three remaining demands of AIMTC are as follows:-

Demand

Diesel prices be made stable and uniform all over the country and pricing mechanism be made transparent.

Ministry's stand

We have taken up the matter with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (PNG). They have stated that the price of diesel/petrol is dependent upon the international price of crude. Hon. Members are also aware that the administered price system is no more in force, and market forces decide the cost of fuel. Notwithstanding this, the Ministry of PNG has agreed that they would be willing to consider not revising the fuel prices every fortnight subject to the condition that price fluctuation remains within 25 paise per litre. In case the fluctuation is more than 25 paise, then they would have to revise the prices.

Demand

Abolition of Toll Tax on four lane Highways and Cess on diesel:

Ministry's stand

It has been made clear to the transporters that funds are required not only for development of highways but also for improving the entire road network in the country, including the rural roads and State highways. It has also been clarified that toll is a 'user fee' which is being charged from those who use this much improved facility which results in saving to the user.

7.00 P.M.

It has also been made clear to the striking transporters that it is not possible to accept this demand.

Demand

Effectively control the overloading and unloading of overloaded goods be made compulsory.

Ministry's stand

Overloading of vehicles is a violation of the Motor Vehicles Act. Ministry of Road Transport & Highways takes a serious view of this. Checking of overloading falls under the purview of the respective States/UTs. The States have been informed that if they fail to check overloading, this Ministry would be constrained to invoke the provisions of the Central Road Fund Act, 2000 and stop the grant that is being made available to them.

As stated earlier, the Ministry has no dispute with the AIMTC on seven out of the ten demands. The eighth demand is not negotiable. Therefore, effectively only two demands, namely, one with the Ministry of PNG and the other with the State Governments require discussion. The Petroleum Ministry has already been addressed in this regard.

Hence, my request to the striking transporters has been that in as much as there is no difference of opinion on most of the demands, it would help in creating a congenial atmosphere by calling off their agitation. The remaining two demands can be discussed to find a solution which is acceptable to all.

Notwithstanding all these efforts, in anticipation, the Ministry has taken a number of steps in order that normalcy is maintained to the extent possible. Some of the major steps taken are:-

i) Control Room has been set up in the Ministry as well as in all the State Capitals to monitor the price situation and law and order.

ii) Effective steps have been taken to ensure that flow of perishables and essential commodities are not adversely affected. The States have been advised to utilise all modes of transport and movement of such goods.

iii) States have activated their field staff to caution wholesalers and retailers from profiteering.

iv) Police force has been alerted so that no untoward law and order situation arises.

v) Ministry of Railways has been requested to provide adequate support in moving the essential commodities.

vi) Ministry of PNG has been alerted to ensure that shortage of fuel supply does not take place in the States.

vii) I am personally in touch with the Chief Ministers and Transport Ministers of the various States.

viii) All States have taken adequate steps and it is well-known that in a strike situation some minor hardships would be caused to the citizens. However, by and large, supply of essential commodities including perishables has been maintained throughout the country.

Through you, Sir, I once again request the transporters to withdraw their strike immediately.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA) : The clarifications on the statement may be sought tomorrow. Now the House stands adjourned till 11.00 a.m. on Wednesday, the 23rd April, 2003.

The House then adjourned at three minutes past seven of the clock till eleven of the clock on Wednesday, the 23rd April, 2003.

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